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Georgia Southern University Athletics



Far From Home: California Duo Daeja Holmes, Simone James Talk About First Year As Eagles

The pair are the first student-athletes from California to play for Georgia Southern women's basketball
Women's Basketball

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STATESBORO - Georgia Southern Head Women's Basketball Coach [Anita Howard](#)'s desire is to make Eagle basketball a national brand. And what better way to do that than to recruit a pair of players from the West Coast to play in Statesboro?

Eagle freshmen [Daeja Holmes](#) (Fresno, Calif.) and [Simone James](#) (San Diego, Calif.) each made the decision to travel cross country to further their basketball careers. In doing so, they become the first Californians to play women's basketball at Georgia Southern in the 47-year history of the program.

We sat down with the duo to get their thoughts on making the decision to travel nearly 2,500 miles from home to go to college. And for both Daeja and Simone. Georgia Southern was not on their collegiate radar until their senior seasons in high school.

"My AAU coach hit me up about them," Holmes said. "He told me he sent my film to the coaches, and that was the first time I'd heard of them."

It was the same for Simone. "My AAU coach told me that Coach [Chris] Straker talked to her during my senior year as well," James said.

The decision turned out to be a very important one for Daeja, who had never been even out of her home state before making the decision to move to Georgia. "I've never traveled like that," Holmes said. "I never really left my home town."

"I'm the complete opposite," James said. "I'm originally from Virginia, and my mom is military. So I'd been everywhere east, even the Middle East. In my freshman year of high school, we relocated to San Diego."

Did either Simone or Daeja have any misgivings about moving so far from home?

"A lot of my family asked me why I picked Georgia Southern because it's so far," Holmes said. "But I've always wanted to get away from home, so I just went with it. I could have gone to other places, closer places."

The story was quite different for Simone. "I have no family in San Diego, so I wanted to move back east. And my mom was super happy. As soon as I told her I wanted to go to Georgia Southern, she pursued getting orders to get re-stationed to Augusta."

Culturally, Georgia and California are quite different. We asked both what the first difference they noticed when they got to Georgia?

"The people," Holmes said. "And the slang people use. Some of the things they say, it catches you off guard. And like when I said 'Have you ever been to the snow?' People didn't know what I meant. That was a lesson I learned."

"For me, it's the weather," James said. "That's super different. Here, you've got all four seasons. In San Diego, everything's kind of the same."

The differences don't stop there, of course. Even though both Simone and Daeja are from California, the two come from cities that are 335 miles apart, yet still in the same state. For a comparison, that's the same distance as it is from Statesboro to Orlando, Fla.

"They're super far," James said about their two home towns. "Northern California is a different community than Southern California. I would only go to NoCal for basketball. The scenery is different. It's like two different states."

It's natural to be a little homesick so far from home, so we asked both what they miss the most about California.

"My brothers for sure," Holmes said. "Last year, we built the biggest relationships. We used to fight all the time. But we got so close, and it kinda hurt that they're so far away. We call though. That's the biggest thing I miss."

It's a similar answer for Simone. "All my friends," James said. "Back in San Diego, I built the best relationships with my friends, relationships that will last the longest."

It hasn't taken long for both Californians to contribute during their freshman seasons. James has cracked the starting lineup and is averaging 6.5 points and 1.5 steals per game, while Holmes currently ranks third on the team in scoring, averaging 8.4 points per game, and is the Eagles' best three-point shooter at 42.1% (16-of-38).

With that kind of impact, it certainly won't be another 47 years before the Eagles entice another Californian, or two, to come to Statesboro!
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